

## Groups Share Vision For North End Block

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The YMCA was looking to expand into north Hartford. The Urban League wanted another place to establish youth programs. And Community Health Services, on Albany Avenue in the North End, just happened to own a sizable piece of developable land.

So the three groups got together, came up with a plan to suit all their needs, and decided to split the bill.

Their idea would lay the groundwork for what is being dubbed the North Hartford Renaissance Project. At the core of the plan is a new 25,000-square-foot YMCA to be built on the old supermarket lot owned by Community Health Services. The Urban League of Greater Hartford would locate some of its programs inside the new building.

Meanwhile, Community Health Services, which is looking to develop the empty third floor of its building at 500 Albany Ave., will get to do that, using money the three groups collectively raise.

But as they started talking, the CEOs of the three nonprofit organizations realized they could be more ambitious, perhaps gathering enough funds to redevelop an entire block in the poorest section of the city.

They drew up a \$100 million redevelopment plan for the block along Albany Avenue between Garden and Brook streets. In addition to the YMCA and the development of the health center's third floor, the plan for the block calls for:

A parking garage of 300 to 400 spaces, with ground floor retail, to be located adjacent to the health center.

A senior housing complex.

Three-story row townhouses.

Rehabilitating homes in the area.

Creating a small park.

"We began to realize that these were things we could do together," said Michael Sherman, chief executive officer of Community Health Services.

Sherman and others credited Mayor Eddie A. Perez for bringing the groups together after each had approached the mayor to discuss plans.

In an announcement Wednesday, the mayor said the plan could remake the face of the North End. "This is the glue that will bring this community together," Perez said.

Officials said they are far from meeting the \$100 million price tag for all phases of the ambitious plan. But they say that the first phase, which includes the YMCA building and expansion of the health center, could begin next year.

They expect the entire project to be completed by 2010.

The new YMCA branch, to be located along Garden Street, reflects that agency's desire to return to the North End

neighborhood, said Tom Reynolds, vice president of development services for the YMCA of Greater Hartford. The group had a site in the former Stowe Village housing project, which was demolished in 1998.

YMCA officials say they will consult the neighborhood to determine what programs to offer in the new branch. Likely offerings will include an after-school program, a reading program for adults with dyslexia, parenting classes and workshops in basic banking and finance.

The new third floor of the health center will expand on the pediatric and women's health units and create an adolescent health program. The expansion would allow the center to serve 4,000 more patients annually, Sherman said. It currently serves 16,000.

The Urban League said combining its programs with those of the YMCA would make the new facility "a mecca for youth in the neighborhoods." It plans to offer literacy programs and GED preparation, and, with the YMCA, will provide child care for adults who are taking classes at the site

"It's remarkable," Sherman said, "how similar the visions and dreams of the three CEOs are."

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